

## **ABSTRACT**

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### **AN EXPLANATORY STUDY TO DETERMINE THE IMPACT OF SELF-ESTEEM AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT ON AGGRESSION AMONG INSTITUTIONALIZED ADOLESCENT MALES**

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The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of self-esteem and academic achievement on aggression. The sample for this study consisted of forty adolescent males at Hillside Psychiatric Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia. They currently reside in this hospital in long term treatment.

Two questionnaires, consisting of twenty-five questions each was administered by two social work interns, to all adolescent males on four different units. The Wechsler's Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R) was also used. The results were analyzed utilizing frequency distributions, means, standard deviation and Pearson's r Correlation Coefficient.

The findings indicate that there is a moderately strong, negative and statistically significant relationship between self-esteem and aggression. The findings further indicate that there is a strong, negative and statistically significant relationship between academic achievement and aggression.

AN EXPLANATORY STUDY TO DETERMINE THE IMPACT  
OF SELF-ESTEEM AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT  
ON AGGRESSION AMONG INSTITUTIONALIZED ADOLESCENT MALES

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Aggression is becoming more and more prevalent in today's world and aggressive acts are especially on the increase with adolescents. These acts are definitely a problem with dysfunctional youth already in treatment. Most acts of aggression that are brought to the attention of the public occur in society, outside the realms of institutions. There are several factors involved in acts of aggression and why they occur; especially with adolescent males in long-term residential treatment.

Aggressive behavior, when carried to extremes, can also be dysfunctional. Bandura contends that aggressive behavior is acquired through observation of others, direct experiences with positive and negative reinforcements, training or instruction, and bizarre beliefs. Once established, people continue to aggress for at least five different reasons: they enjoy inflicting injury on the victim (positive reinforcement); they avoid or counter the aversive consequences of aggression by others (negative reinforcement); they receive injury or harm for not behaving aggressively (punishment); their aggressive behavior enables them to live up to personal standards of conduct (self-reinforcement); and they observe others receiving reward for aggressive acts or punishment for nonaggressive behavior.<sup>1</sup>

Further light is shed on clients' difficulties by determining how they have attempted

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<sup>1</sup> J. Feist, "Theories of Personality", (N.Y., CBS College Publishing, 1985): pg. 150.

to cope with their problems. The coping methods they employ give valuable clues to their levels of stress and of functioning. Exploration may reveal that a client has marked deficits in coping skills, relying upon rigid patterns that often prove dysfunctional. Some clients employ avoidance patterns through withdrawing or attempting to numb or fortify themselves by using drugs or alcohol. Other clients attempt to cope with interpersonal problems by resorting to aggression or other domineering behaviors. Still other clients manifest flexible and effective coping patterns but collapse under unusually high levels of stress that would overwhelm even the strongest persons. By contrast, other clients depend heavily upon others to manage problematic situations for them.<sup>2</sup>

Exploring how clients have attempted to cope with problems sometimes reveals that they struggled effectively with similar problems in the past but are no longer able to do so. In such instances, it is important to explore carefully what has changed.

Persons who relate aggressively seek to dominate others, ignoring their needs, wants, and feelings. Unable to express themselves effectively in a wide variety of situations, such persons often feel unappreciated, taken for granted, and exploited by others. Many other persons, who relate aggressively, often suffer the loss of significant relationships because others weary of their abrasive, debasing response styles. As a result, such persons unwittingly deprive themselves of opportunities to receive essential warmth, support, and affection.

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<sup>2</sup> D.H. Hepworth, J. A. Larsen, Direct Social Work Practice, "Theories and Skills", (Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1992): pg. 42.

Still other persons vacillate between aggressive and nonassertive or passive behavior, failing to develop an effective and comfortable style of relating to others.<sup>3</sup>

Clients often seek (or are coerced to seek professional assistance because of problems that can be traced to habitual styles of relating aggressively. Experienced over long periods of time, such difficulties may cause or contribute to depression, anxiety in interpersonal situations, poor academic performance, or low self-esteem.

Findings of a recent study conducted by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency on violent crimes show that the number of violent crimes committed by juveniles between 1982 and 1992 grew from 17.2 percent to 17.5 percent, an increased of merely three-tenths of a percent.<sup>4</sup> However, the same study suggested that although the total number of incidents may not have changed dramatically, the lethality of these incidents (for example, gang-related deaths and suicides) seems to be higher than a decade ago. The destructive effects of these incidents, particularly in the school environments, are felt by students, parents, and teachers alike regardless of race and socioeconomic status.

The literature consists of several studies exploring aggression in society, but very little has been written concerning aggression within the institution. Research has failed to address the significance of academic achievement and self-esteem as indicators of aggression,

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<sup>3</sup> D.H. Hepworth, J.A. Larsen, Direct Social Work Practice, "Theories and Skills", (Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1992.): pg. 44.

<sup>4</sup> Jones, M., & Krisberg, B. Images and reality: Juvenile crime, youth violence and public policy. (San Francisco, National Council on Crime and delinquency)

therefore the interrelatedness of these variables has not been explored.

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The aggressive tendency is present in everyone and is the explanation for wars, atrocities, religious persecutions, and murder, as well as malicious gossip, sarcasm, and humiliation.<sup>5</sup> Aggression has played a instrumental role in the history of the world since the beginning of time. Aggressive acts have progressed as rapidly as technology has in other areas and worsened. Society has expressed much concern about the upcoming generation and their behaviors because they will soon be the decision makers of the world.

Most of the present information on acts of aggression tend to center around incidents prevalent to street crimes or domestic violence, thus, there is a lack of attention given to aggressive behavior among institutionalized populations. Why is aggression a problem in the institution? Why do patients commit acts of aggression? What can be done to prevent aggressive acting out? Programs designed for deterring or alleviating aggression have been abundant, but the cause remains the most important question.<sup>6</sup>

Most studies suggest that aggression behaviors are learned at a very early age, are stable over time, and are quite resistant to treatment.<sup>7</sup> Behavioral models suggest that aggression responses are primarily learned from parents, siblings, and peers who reinforce and

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<sup>5</sup> J. Feist, "Theories of Personality", (N.Y., CBS College Publishing, 1985): pg. 152.

<sup>6</sup> J. Feist, "Theories of Personality", (N.Y., CBS College Publishing, 1985): pg. 153.

<sup>7</sup> Paterson, G. R., DeBaryshe, B. B., & Ramsey, E. A developmental perspective on antisocial behavior. American Psychologist, 44, pg. 329-335.

reward aggressive types of problem solving. Other studies on youths' aggressive responses are in part due to frustration and an improper perception of situations. These studies suggest that youths have learned to respond to situations aggressively without the proper observation of the perceived offense and without the ability to think of alternatives.<sup>8</sup>

Kay and colleagues developed an aggression risk profile for predicting verbal, physical, and general manifestations of aggression in psychiatric inpatients. The aggression risk profile incorporated demographic, diagnostic, historical, and clinical parameters. Its reliability, discriminative validity, and predictive validity were supported in its application to 208 aggressive and control inpatients. Aggressive subjects were more often found to be males, diagnosed with organic mental syndrome or substance abuse disorder, and to have of aggression. They tended to be angry and excitable but not more floridly ill than controls. Twelve significant predictors were identified, with younger age, shorter length of illness, hostility, depression, anger, and difficulty in delaying gratification being most reliable.<sup>9</sup>

Risk factors associated with the development of these behaviors include family instability, family psychopathology and criminal behavior, poor discipline practices, lack of parental supervision, academic problems, and a range of other environmental factors (for

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<sup>8</sup> Bjorkqvist, K., & Osterman, K., Parental influence on children's self-estimated aggressiveness. Aggressive Behavior, 18, pg. 411-423.

<sup>9</sup> S. Kay, F. & M. Wolkenfeld, and L. Mays, Aggression among psychiatric patients, Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 1988(Sep), Vol 176(9), 547-557.

example, high teacher - student ratio, poor working conditions for youths).<sup>10</sup>

The first relationship that will be explored in the present study is between self-esteem and aggression. Friedman believes that a healthy environment for adolescents is a necessary but not sufficient condition for healthy development. The burden for health enhancing behavior lies with adolescents. If the environment is inadequate or the adolescent lacks self-esteem, behaviors dangerous to health are more likely to occur.<sup>11</sup> "Adolescent behavior is often governed by beliefs about what others think."<sup>12</sup> Most studies indicate that there is a strong relationship between an inappropriate environment or low self-esteem and dangerous behaviors or aggression.

However, some studies suggest that some individuals have high self-esteem regardless of their environment, and there are others that feel the two are unrelated. Due to conflicting views of research in this particular area additional research needs to be conducted to explain this relationship.<sup>13</sup>

The second relationship that will be explored in the present study is between academic

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<sup>10</sup> Kazdin, A., *Aggressive behavior and conduct disorder*. (New York: Pergamon Press), The practice of child therapy, 1991, pg. 174-221.

<sup>11</sup> H. Friedman, (WHO, Family Health Division), *The Health of adolescents: Beliefs and behavior*. *Social Science and Medicine*, 1989, Vol 29 (3), 309-315.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> E. Larson & O. Thienhaus, *The development of self-esteem in psychiatric residents: A survey*, 38th Annual Meeting of the American Psychiatric Association (1985, Dallas, Texas), *Journal of Psychiatric Education*, 1988 (Spr), Vol 12 (1), 44-50.



achievement and aggression. The relationship between academic achievement and aggression has played a role in several theories of aggression. Several studies have shown that poor academic achievement in students have higher rates of aggression than do students with high academic achievement. In a study conducted by Gaughan and Axelrod they measured academic achievement with 40 emotionally disturbed or behavior-disordered psychiatric patients. Subjects participated in a token economy over the course of an entire academic year. There was no significant relationships between behavior and academic achievement.<sup>14</sup>

However, only a small amount of literature exists that thoroughly explains the relationship between academic achievement and aggression. Therefore, the present study will re-examine the relationship between the variables to establish a clearer analogy of academic achievement and its relationship to aggression in adolescent males in long-term psychiatric residential treatment.

### SIGNIFICANCE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

If the aggressive acts of adolescent males in the treatment setting are not curbed, psychiatric staff members and other patients will soon see the same types of aggression as the rest of society. Aggression within the institution, in a way, is accepted because it is expected due to the patient's placement, social history, and medical condition. The role of the social worker is vital in establishing productive interventions. The problem needs to be addressed

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<sup>14</sup> E. Gaughan & S. Axelrod, (State U New York, Child Research and Study Center, Albany) Behavior and achievement relationships with emotionally disturbed children: An applied study. *Psychology in the schools*, 1989(Jan), Vol 26(1), 89-99.

at the root, instead of the application of surface interventions.

This study will attempt show how self-esteem and academic achievement play a role in aggressive behavior in adolescent males within the treatment setting that may provide more understanding about aggression. This is definitely a problem that needs to be addressed with all the problems surrounding the adolescent male population. This study will hopefully lay some important groundwork for the field of social work in this are for the future. The data from this study could be used to improve or expand on already existing policies or procedures that seek to eliminate or alleviate aggression in the institution.

The present study will fill some gaps by adding to some pertinent theories that were not totally explored and by applying some other theories and research. There are three main objectives of this study: the first, is to explore the relationship between self-esteem and aggression; the second, is to explore the relationship between academic achievement and aggression; and the third, is to explore the relative importance of both self-esteem and academic achievement. This study will explore whether self-esteem or academic achievement is more significant in interpreting aggressive behavior.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Self-Esteem and Aggression

The relationship between self-esteem and aggression, along with academic achievement have been studied and observed in many professions. This section will discuss research relevant to these variables.

Sharon Miller discusses approaches that can be used by health-care professionals to assist adolescents in improving or maintaining their level of self-esteem. While hospitalized it is noted that self-esteem is the most important factor affecting behavior and that adolescence is a critical period in the formation of self-esteem.<sup>15</sup> Illness and hospitalization during this period can interfere with the ability to achieve developmental tasks. The potential loss of independence and subjection to multiple traumatic experiences that accompany hospitalization can be detrimental to self-esteem. Clinical interventions for maintaining self-esteem include interaction with significant others and groups, building trust positive feedback and attention, and self-monitoring.<sup>16</sup>

Larson and Thienhaus interviewed 31 psychiatric patients about changes they perceived in their self-esteem over 3 years of hospitalization. Self-esteem was defined as a

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<sup>15</sup> S. Miller, (James Whitcomb Riley Hospital for Children, Indianapolis, IN), Promoting self-esteem in the hospitalized adolescent: Clinical Interventions. Issues in Comprehensive Pediatric Nursing, 1987, Vol 10(3), 187-194.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

sense of trust in one's own competence. Results indicate that self-esteem tended to increase during the subjects first 6 months. During the second and third years self-esteem decreased significantly.

Schneider and Leitenberg compared 22 aggressive, 28 withdrawn, 14 aggressive-withdrawn, and 21 control children (aged 9-13 yrs) showing neither aggressive nor withdrawn behavior on self-esteem, attributions to ability and lack of ability and lack of ability after success or failure, and optimism and pessimism about their long term personal futures. Measures included the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (The Way I Feel About Myself).

Aggressive subjects had higher self-esteem than either withdrawn subjects or aggressive-withdrawn subjects, and controls had the highest self-esteem of all. Controls also attributed success to ability more than the 2 groups with high withdrawal scores but did not differ from aggressive subjects.<sup>17</sup>

Bemporad conceptualizes depression as the response to the loss of meaning or satisfaction sufficient to affect the individual's optimal view of the self. At each stage of the life cycle, the failure to achieve developmental tasks threatens the concept of the self, producing a phase-specific vulnerability to depression. Adolescence presents particular

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<sup>17</sup> M. Schneider & H. Leitenberg, (University of Vermont and State Agricultural College, Burlington) A comparison aggressive and withdrawn children's self-esteem, optimism and pessimism, and causal attributions for success and failure. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 1989(Apr), Vol 17(2), 133-144.

stresses by forcing the youngster to relinquish the relative familiarity and security of a childhood psychosocial role and create a sense of self independent of family, without childhood denial mechanisms, and of value to a new peer culture.<sup>18</sup>

Most individuals experience a sense of loss, confusion, apprehension, and dysphoria during this difficult period of transition. Many who seek psychotherapy require only a secure holding environment that will support their self-esteem as they create new avenues of worth and satisfaction.<sup>19</sup>

Friedman believes that if the environment is inadequate or the adolescents lacks self-esteem, behaviors dangerous to health are more likely to occur. These include precocious and unprotected sexual behavior; the use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs; injuries arising accidentally from risk taking behaviors, especially when combined with alcohol or drugs; intentional injury whether self-inflicted or inflicted by others; and poor eating and habits of hygiene. Adolescent behavior is often governed by beliefs about what others think. Two way communication in a trusting atmosphere will reduce myths and misinformation and encourage healthy behavior.<sup>20</sup>

Even so, some children appear more prone to engage in aggressive behavior than do

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<sup>18</sup> J. Bemporad, (Harvard Medical School) Massachusetts Mental Health Center, Boston) Psychodynamic treatment of depressed adolescents. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 1988(Sep), Vol 49(9, Suppl), 26-31.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> H. Friedman, (WHO, Family Division) The health of adolescents: Beliefs and Behavior. *Social Science and Medicine*, 1989, Vol 29(3), 309-315.

others. According to Boldizar, Perry & Perry some cases of aggressiveness derive from a developmental lag in children's acquisition of role-taking skills. But this is not the entire story. More aggressive children, particularly boys, report that aggression produces tangible rewards and reduces negative treatment by other children.<sup>21</sup>

Additionally, researchers find that youngsters who see and hear angry exchanges among adults become emotionally distressed and respond by aggressing against their peers.<sup>22</sup>

Anthropologist D. Fry suggests that this observation may hold cross-culturally. He studied aggressive behaviors among children in two neighboring Zapotec-speaking communities of Mexico. Levels of violence, including homicide rates, were substantially higher in one of the Indian communities than in the other. Not surprisingly, youngsters from the more aggressive community engaged in considerably more actual fighting and rough play than did their counterparts in the other communities. Fry's research suggests that community differences in levels of aggression are perpetuated from one generation to the next as youngsters learn their community's patterns for handling and expressing aggression.<sup>23</sup>

Situational factors, especially competition, may also precipitate aggression according to Vander Zanden. Research has shown that the keener the competition for valued but scarce

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<sup>21</sup> J.W. Vander Zanden, *Human Development*, (McGraw-Hill Publishing, 1993): pg. 202.

<sup>22</sup> J.W. Vander Zanden, *Human Development*, (McGraw-Hill Publishing, 1993): pg. 203.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 203.

resources, the more aggressively children behave.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, where children can maximize their payoff by aggressively defeating their opponent, aggressive responses are reinforced. Moreover, competitive situations frequently arouse feelings of rivalry that extend beyond merely winning the competition; children then go out of their way to hurt their opponents.<sup>25</sup>

### Academic Achievement and Aggression

Academic achievement is one of the variables used to explain aggression among adolescents. This is the second variable explored in this study to show a significant relationship between academic achievement and aggression. despite years of research the relationship between academic achievement and aggression are ambivalent.

Hodges and Plow studied the IQ and academic achievement of psychiatrically hospitalized children. The sample consisted of 76 children, with a mean age of 10 years, who received diagnoses of conduct, oppositional, anxiety, and affective disorders on the basis of a structured diagnostic interview. A relative deficit in verbal abilities was observed for conduct-disordered children, extending to preadolescence findings previously obtained for adolescent delinquents.<sup>26</sup>

Depressed children were characterized by underachievement, which is consistent with

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<sup>24</sup> J.W. Vander Zanden, *Human Development*, (McGraw-Hill Publishing, 1993): pg. 206.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, pg. 207.

<sup>26</sup> K. Hodges & J. Plow, (Eastern Michigan U) Intellectual ability and achievement in psychiatrically hospitalized children with conduct, anxiety, and affective disorders. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 1990(Oct), Vol 58(5), 589-595.

the learned helplessness literature. Contrary to expectations, children with an anxiety disorder had a lower IQ than children without the disorder. No cognitive deficits were observed for children diagnosed as oppositional.<sup>27</sup>

Finch and colleagues investigated the extent to which IQ and emotional/behavioral factors were related to tested academic achievement in 56 child psychiatric inpatients (aged 6 years 6 months to 16 years 8 months). Subjects completed a battery of tests, including the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R), the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children, the Child Behavior Checklist, and the Peabody Individual Achievement Test. Results Indicate That WISC-R IQ's were highly correlated with academic achievement.

Only trait anxiety correlated significantly with academic achievement; however, after the relationship between trait anxiety and WISC-R Verbal IQ was partialled out, the correlation between anxiety and academic achievement was no longer significant.<sup>28</sup> Frentz and associates investigated social competence and achievement differences among 331 popular, controversial, neglected, or rejected adolescents in Grades 6-10 using a sociometric classification procedure described by J.D. Coie.<sup>29</sup> Comparisons were made from teachers' and

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> A. Finch, R. Blount, C. Saylor, and V. Wolfe (Medical U of South Carolina, Charleston) Intelligence and emotional/behavioral factors as correlates of achievement in child psychiatric inpatients. *Psychological Reports*, 1988(Aug), Vol 29(2), 109-120.

<sup>29</sup> C. Frentz, F. Gresham, & S. Elliot (Louisiana State U) Popular, controversial, neglected, and rejected adolescents: Contrasts of social competence and achievement



self-report judgements of social skills, behavior problems, and academic achievement. Measures included the Behavior Problem Checklist and the Self-Control Rating Scale.

Significant differences and trends in the data indicated that popular subjects displayed more socially skilled behaviors and fewer behavior problems than rejected subjects. No differences in teacher rated social skills, problem behaviors, or academic achievement were found between popular, controversial, and neglected groups.<sup>30</sup>

Gaddy reviewed the relationship between school order (i.e., behavior in the school environment) and achievement at the secondary school level. It is noted that the literature does not clarify why individuals who misbehave perform poorly in school. One inference drawn here is that failure to distinguish order as a product of coercion from order as a manifestation of self-discipline may result in the failure of research to clarify the relationship between order and achievement.<sup>31</sup>

Hall and Cairns feel as though children have a considerable influence on one another in the expression of aggressive behavior. Patterson, Littman and Bricker have described how the process frequently operates in nursery school settings. They recorded the aggressive interactions that occurred among thirty-six nursery school children over a twenty-six week period. They found that when an aggressive response (for instance, a kick or a punch) was

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differences. *Journal of School Psychology*, 1991(Sum), vol29(2), 109-120.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> G. Gaddy, (Res. & Eval. Association, Chapel Hill, NC) high school order and academic achievement. *American Journal of Education*, 1988(Aug), Vol 96(4), 496-518.

followed by crying, withdrawing, or acquiescing, the attacker was likely to aggress against the victim again. These reactions functioned as positive reinforcers for the aggressor. When aggressive behavior was followed by punishment (for instance, retaliatory responses, efforts to recover the seized item, or teacher intervention), aggressors were more likely to pick a different victim for their future aggression or to alter their interactions with the original victim. Hence, the feedback provided for aggressors influences their subsequent behavior.<sup>32</sup>

The researchers also found that while some children entered nursery school with a repertoire of aggressive behaviors, others were passive and unassertive at first. But after the relatively unaggressive children learned to counteraggress and thus end other children's aggressive acts, they themselves began to aggress against new victims.<sup>33</sup>

In a pioneering study in Sweden Dan Olweus found that about 20 percent of school-age boys were involved, half of whom were bullies and half their victims. But the study by the national Association of Secondary School Principals revealed that even in the best administered schools, 25 percent of students said that the possibility of being bullied was one of their most serious concerns.<sup>34</sup>

Olweus found in his study of Swedish boys that bullies react aggressively in many

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<sup>32</sup> J.W. Vander Zanden, *Human Development*, (McGraw-Hill Publishing, 1993): pg 407.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, pg. 407.

<sup>34</sup> J.W. Vander Zanden, *Human Development*, (McGraw-Hill Publishing, 1993): pg. 408.

different situations, possess weak inhibitions against aggressive tendencies, and have positive attitudes toward violence. They tend to be fearless, tough youngsters. In contrast, "whipping boys"<sup>35</sup>-youngsters who are teased, ridiculed, hit, and pushed about tend to be anxious, insecure, and somewhat low in self-esteem. These latter youngster seem to attract aggression and become its recurrent victims.

Some researchers report that victimized preschoolers frequently have a history of insecure attachment with their caregivers which causes them to radiate an anxious vulnerability. Often victimized youngsters are also "ineffectual aggressors"<sup>36</sup> they become easily embroiled in conflicts only to end up losing the battles amidst an exaggerated display of misery and frustration.<sup>37</sup>

Psychologist Nathaniel Floyd has studied 230 juvenile bullies and their victims during three years with the Board of Cooperative Educational Services of South Westchester, New York. He, too, finds that bullies and victims are often drawn to one another and that the resulting interaction almost a dance that goes on between them cannot be understood by looking at one side or the other. The bully sees in the victim a part of himself that he has had to renounce. A bully at school is frequently a victim of abuse and neglect at home.

In the course of growing up most children gain a sense of strength and independence.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pg. 408.

<sup>36</sup> J. W. Vander Zanden, *Human Development*, (McGraw-Hill Publishing, 1993): pg. 409.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, pg. 409.

But if they are humiliated and battered, they may begin to hate the vulnerable side of themselves. When they encounter another youngster who is vulnerable, their own inner feelings of humiliation and shame are activated. And because in their home environments they have learned aggressive responses and come to identify with the aggressor parent, a weaker child provokes hostility rather than compassion. Their dominating veneer masks an underlying sense of inadequacy and fear that they are not in control. Their victims tend to come from one of two family backgrounds. They too may be abused youngsters, but instead of identifying with the aggressor parent, they look to the victim parent for comfort and support. Or they may be bows who are pampered and discouraged from gaining autonomy through physical competence.<sup>38</sup>

Psychologists Huesmann, Eron, and Yarmel have tracked 870 children from Columbia County, New York from the time they were 8 until they were 30. Although the research found that bullies do not seem to have lower intelligence than other youngsters, as adults they score lower on tests of intellectual achievement. Their teachers loathed them because they were troublemakers, and, apparently, their school difficulties interfered with their learning. They also had more run-ins with the law and had less desirable jobs than their more peaceable peers. And just as they were more likely to have been abused as children, the grown-up bullies

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<sup>38</sup> J. Feist, "Theories of Personality", (N.Y., CBS College Publishing 1985): pg. 176.

were far more likely to abuse their spouses and punish their children severely.<sup>39</sup>

Although boys were more likely to be aggressive than girls, the meaner girls also tended to punish their own children more harshly and to raise meaner children. Moreover, other researchers find that youngsters with poor peer adjustment are at risk for later life difficulties. Researchers also find that the belligerence of bullies may have an additional source. Bullies have a perceptual bias that leads them to see and retaliate against threats where none exist. They tend to attribute hostile intentions to other youngsters who actually mean them no harm.<sup>40</sup>

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research literature suggests that aggressive behavior is associated with the level of self-esteem in adolescents. Theories of aggression have not directly explored the relationship between academic achievement and aggression. Expectations regarding these relationships however, can be modeled from some theories. The two theories are the ecological model and the social control theory. Both will be used in this study to explain the findings on the relationship between self-esteem and aggression and academic achievement and aggression.

The first theoretical framework that will be used to explain the relationships of this

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<sup>39</sup> J.W. Vander Zanden, Human Development, (McGraw-Hill Publishing, 1993): pg. 211.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, pg. 212.

study is the Ecological Model. this model is a natural extension of the "person-in-environment" perspective.<sup>41</sup> It deals with environmental factors and understanding ways in which people interact with their environments. When people are exposed to rich resources required for growth and development, people then tend to thrive. In relation to this study, this would produce high self-esteem therefor bringing about low rates of aggression.

When people are deprived of vital resources, physical, social, and emotional development and on-going functioning may be adversely affected. In relation to this study, this particular environment would produce low self-esteem therefore, bringing about a higher rate of aggression. For example, a substantial body of research indicated that supportive social networks of friends, relatives, neighbors, work and church associates, and pets mitigate the damaging effect of painful life stresses.<sup>42</sup>

By contrast, people with deficient social networks may respond to life stresses by becoming severely depressed, resorting to abuse of drugs or alcohol, engaging in violent behaviors (aggression), or by coping in other dysfunctional ways.<sup>43</sup>

The second theoretical framework that will be used in this study is the social control theory. This theory deals with the individual's relational bonds and restraints of deviant

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<sup>41</sup> D.H. Hepworth, J.A. Larsen, Direct Social Work Practice, "Theories and Skills", (Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1992): pg. 77.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, pg. 78.

<sup>43</sup> D.H. Hepworth & J.A. Larsen, Direct Social Work Practice, "Theories and Skills", (Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1992): pg. 89.

behaviors. Involvement in conventional institutions (such as religious and academic institutions) and shared beliefs presumably provide a stake in conformity through behavioral obligations. (Gannaway, 1995)<sup>44</sup>

Most academic arena's provide structuring and support the norm's of society as a whole. In relation to this particular theory, people who engage in academic achievement studies will be less likely to engage in aggressive acting out behaviors. Strong ties to academic institutions play a vital role in prevention violent behaviors (aggression). Individuals having higher rates of academic achievement and thus having lower rates of aggression, supports the social control explanation of this relationship. Therefore, since academic underachievement depicts a lack of social control, academic underachievement should increase the chances of aggressive behaviors.

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<sup>44</sup> R. Jarjoura, Does Dropping Out of School Enhance Delinquent Involvement? Results From a Large-Scale National Probability Sample, *Criminology* 31 (1993): 149-172.

## STATEMENT OF THE HYPOTHESIS

Is there a negative and significant relationship between self-esteem and aggression. The hypothesis may then be formally stated as:

H1: There will be a negative and significant difference between self-esteem and aggression.

Is there a negative and significant relationship between academic achievement and aggression. The hypothesis may be formally stated as:

H2: There will be a negative and significant relationship between academic achievement and aggression.

## VARIABLES

The independent variable of this study is aggression.

The dependent variables of this study are self-esteem and academic achievement.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

Aggression - to attack verbally or physically, to cause harm to a person; also to cause property destruction.

Self-Esteem - belief in oneself, self-respect, how one feels about them self.

Academic Achievement - to succeed in doing schoolwork; to bring about the desired result academically.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### Design and Sample

The mode of observation that will be used to collect the data will be survey research. The sample on which this study will be drawn from will be forty adolescent males at a psychiatric residential center in Atlanta, Ga. Data will be collected by administering questionnaire's to four units of adolescent males. The questionnaire's will be administered by two social work interns at each of the four adolescent male units. The method of sampling that will be used is convenience (nonprobability) sampling. This method will be used because the most available subjects will be included in the sample.

#### Measurement

Having decided that self-reports of their own experience was what needed to be measured, three separate scales were used for each respective variable. Self-Esteem is operationalized as belief in oneself, self respect, and self concept. Self-Esteem will be measured by the Index of Self-Esteem (ISE). This questionnaire is designed to see how you see yourself. This survey instrument is composed of twenty-five questions, and will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The five response categories ranged from rarely or none of the time to most or all of the time.

Academic achievement is operationalized as obtaining, succeeding, and gaining knowledge in the academic institution. Academic achievement will measured by the Wechsler

Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R).

Aggression is operationalized as physically striking out at another person, property destruction, angry outbursts (temper tantrums), and verbal threats. The researcher has created a scale consisting of twenty-five questions asking respondents to answer to questions about aggression, property destruction, and angry outbursts. There are five response categories ranging from rarely or none of the time to most or all of the time.

This scale will also take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

### Data Analysis

The independent variables self-esteem and academic achievement are continuous. The dependent variable aggression is also continuous therefore, to determine the statistical test for each hypothesis the researcher will use Pearson's (R) to test the validity of the assumptions/hypotheses. The data obtained in this study was coded into a computer and analyzed by the use of the statistical computer program Statistical Package For The Social Sciences.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> N.H. Nie, D.H. Hull, J.C. Jenkins, K. Steinbrunner, Statistical Package For The Social Sciences, 2nd Ed., 1985, New York: McGraw-Hill.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

This chapter will summarize the data collected from the participants of the study. Table 1 represents frequencies and percentages of data from the self-esteem, academic achievement, and aggression scales. Table 2 represents bivariate correlations of the study's variables. The alpha level was set at .05 to determine whether to reject or accept the study hypotheses.

There were a total of forty respondents in this study. Adolescent males accounted for one-hundred percent of the sample. Twenty-one of the respondents were African-American males. Eighteen of the respondents were white males. One of the respondents was a Hispanic male. Ages of the respondents ranged from 11 - 18.

Findings from the frequency distribution indicate a mean score of 34 for academic achievement, which means that on average, respondents had "low" levels of academic achievement. The standard deviation for this variable was 5.28. Fourteen percent of the respondents had "high" levels of academic achievement. Thirty-four percent of the respondents had "moderate" levels of academic achievement, while forty-six percent of the respondents had "low" levels of academic achievement.

Findings from the frequency distribution indicate a mean score of 42 for self-esteem, which means that on average, respondents had "low" levels of self-esteem. The standard deviation for this variable was 11.78. Twenty percent of the respondents had "high" levels

of self-esteem. Forty-two percent of the respondents had "moderate" levels of self-esteem and 39 percent maintained "low" self-esteem levels.

Findings from the frequency distributions further indicate a mean score of 21 for aggressive behavior, which indicates that the respondents had "high" levels of aggressive behavior. The standard deviation for this variable was 7.60. Seventeen percent of the respondents had "low" levels of aggressive behavior. Twenty-two percent had "moderate" levels of aggressive behavior, while fifty-nine percent had "high" levels of aggressive behavior.

TABLE 1: FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTIONS OF STUDY VARIABLES

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
<b>ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT</b>		
low	27	46
medium	20	34
high	08	14
<b>SELF ESTEEM</b>		
low	13	39
medium	13	42
high	08	20
<b>AGGRESSION</b>		
low	10	17
medium	13	22
high	34	59

- a. mean=34  
standard deviation=5.29
- b. mean=42  
standard deviation=11.77
- c. mean=21  
standard deviation=7.61

### **BIVARIATE CORRELATIONS OF THE STUDY'S VARIABLES**

Hypothesis 1 stated that there will be a negative and significant relationship between self-esteem and aggression. The analysis of this relationship between self-esteem and aggression reveals that there was moderately strong, negative and statistically significant relationship between self-esteem and aggression ( $r = -.377$  and  $p = .005$ ). As self-esteem scores decrease, scores of aggression increase. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Hypothesis 2 stated that there will be a negative and significant relationship between academic achievement and aggression. The analysis of this relationship between academic achievement and aggression reveals that there was a highly strong, negative and statistically significant relationship between academic achievement and aggression ( $r = -.485$  and  $p = .000$ ). As academic achievement scores decrease, scores of aggression increase. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is also accepted.

TABLE 2: BIVARIATE CORRELATIONS OF STUDY VARIABLES

	ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT	SELF-ESTEEM
AGGRESSION	$r = -.485$ $(p=.000)$	$r = -.377$ $(p=.005)$

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In summation, it was found that there is a significant relationship between self-esteem and aggression. The effects of self-esteem were found to be quite stable across a wide range of aggressive behaviors. Thus, several conclusions can be drawn from these data. First, these data indicate that lower levels of self-esteem may be associated with higher levels of aggressive behavior. Clearly, a direct and negative influence of self-esteem is apparent with regard to aggressive behavior. Those with moderate to low levels of self-esteem are likely to have more incidents of aggressive behavior than those who have high self-esteem levels. These data further suggests that "low" levels of self-esteem produces misconduct, aggression, and should be taken seriously by skeptics.

Self-esteem is essential in helping adolescents deal with important self-concepts, values, and beliefs. A important concept of self is essential when addressing the issue of aggression. Adolescent males definitely need a positive concept of self in a world that is diverse and continuously changing. A positive identity of self is necessary in relationships and other ecosystems in society. Furthermore, having a positive feeling about oneself may allow the individual to feel worthwhile and encouraged to engage in positive relationships and other elements of life. After all, self-esteem of an individual will play a vital role in determining which road a person will take in life.

By using an extremely wide range of both self-esteem and aggression measures, it has



shown clearly, that a moderately strong, negative and statistically significant relationship exists between self-esteem and aggression. Concluding that self-esteem has a strong influence on aggression would be consistent with the findings of extant research. While the constraining effect of self-esteem appears to be stable for a wide range of aggressive behavior, such an impact may change within different social settings and environments.

In addition to verifying the existence of a significant relationship between self-esteem and aggression, comparatively, a slightly stronger relationship between academic achievement and aggression was confirmed. It was found that there is a statistically significant relationship between academic achievement and aggression. The effects of academic achievement were found to be stable across a wide range of aggressive behaviors.

Several conclusions may also be drawn from the existing data. First, this data indicates that lower levels of academic achievement may be associated with a wide range of aggressive behaviors. A clearly direct and negative influence of academic achievement is apparent with regard to aggressive behavior. These findings suggest that having a strong social bond to the school setting is critical for inhibiting involvement in aggressive behavior. Again, a strong social bond to the school setting gives the individual something to identify with and be apart of. Concluding that academic achievement has a strong influence on aggressive behavior would consistent with the findings of extant research. As discussed in the literature review section this study, a number of studies support a significant relationship between academic achievement and aggressive behavior.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Violence and aggression in America continues to impair and jeopardize the lives of young people and the quality of life within their communities. The statistics alone, highlight the dramatic impact violence has on youth in particular. Traditionally, interventions focused on resolving the "symptom", but now or undivided attention needs to be directed toward the causes. The current study confirmed and addressed two such causes of aggressive behavior: low academic achievement and self-esteem levels. Although, comparatively speaking, academic achievement had a slightly stronger relationship with aggressive behavior, both are important factors to consider when working with adolescents. Social workers and other professionals of the sort, should begin to focus on preventative methods to aggressive and select more effective treatment modalities. Of all the known "causes" of aggression school conditions are probably the most changeable. But this will involve not only understanding the social processes, but the quality of life for millions of adolescents.

To the extent that self-esteem causes aggressive behavior, social work practitioners and other professionals of the like, need to develop and implement interventions that teach and reconnect the individual with themselves. Practitioners should also be focused on factors that interrupt and discourage knowledge of self and worthiness in society.

Effective interventions targeting aggression prevention may become more viable when a complete understanding of the self-esteem--aggression and academic achievement relationship is achieved. In addition to aggressive behaviors among adolescents, future

research should examine the nature of these relationships as it varies among subgroups of the population. Differences among subgroups may identified by social class, race or social context. Given the stability and consistency of the influence of self-esteem and academic achievement on aggression, it is suggested that both variables be incorporated in various theories and that measures of these variables be regularly included in future research.

Social workers must also be aware of the tendency of individuals to explain behaviors, particularly aggression, in simplistic ways. Several models have been developed to explain aggressive behavior: genetic, behavioral, cognitive, sociological, economic, and psychoanalytic. None of these factors solely explains aggressive behavior. It is likely that a combination of these factors, interacting in ways still unknown to researchers, and explain aggression in humans.

Social workers face the dilemma of recognizing when aggressive behaviors are skills learned to survive in a hostile environment (for example, a high-crime community). Under these circumstances, any attempts to change the youth's behavior will be met with strong resistance unless alternative environments are provided such as housing in a different neighborhood and significant after school activities.

### Theoretical Implications

This study consisted of self-reporting survey research of institutionalized adolescent males from a Ecological Perspective and Social Control Theory. The Ecological Perspective deals with environmental factors and understanding ways in which people interact with their

environments in relation to self-esteem. The Social Control Theory deals with the individual's relational bonds and restraints of deviant behaviors in relation to conventional institutions (school) and academic achievement. Both of these theories examined the respondents views of their encounters concerning the "person in the environment" and the "conventional institution".

### Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study are limited to institutionalized adolescent males at one psychiatric hospital located in Atlanta, Georgia. The sample for this study was limited to forty respondents, which limits the study to this population only and can not be generalized to the entire population of institutionalized adolescent males.

### Directions For Further Research

While it is evident that self-esteem and academic achievement play a vital role in the aggressive behaviors of institutionalized adolescent males, further research is needed to determine: 1) Why do institutionalized adolescent males have low self-esteem, 2) Why do institutionalized adolescent males have low academic achievement, and 3) Why do they feel that aggression is the appropriate avenue to vent their frustrations. Furthermore, research is needed regarding the treatment program of the hospital along with the parents and the environment of the adolescent. This research is necessary to determine the extent to which their environment and their parents influenced their aggressive behaviors.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

**This questionnaire is designed to measure how you see yourself. It is not a test, so there are no right or wrong answers. Please answer each item as carefully and accurately as you can by placing a number by each one as follows:**

- 1 Rarely or none of the time  
2 A little of the time  
3 Some of the time  
4 A good part of the time  
5 Most or all of the time

**Please begin.**

1. I feel that people would not like me if they really knew me well.
2. I feel that others get along much better than I do.
3. I feel that I am a beautiful person.
4. When I am with other people I feel they are glad I am with them.
5. I feel that people really like to talk with me.
6. I feel that I am a very competent person.
7. I think I make a good impression.
8. I feel that I need more self-confidence.
9. When I am with strangers I am very nervous.
10. I think that I am a dull person.
11. I feel ugly.
12. I feel that others have more fun than I do.
13. I feel that I bore people.
14. I think my friends find me interesting.
15. I think that I have a good sense of humor.
16. I feel very self-conscious when I am with strangers.
17. I feel that if I could be more like other people I would have it made.
18. I feel that people have a good time when they are with me.
19. I feel like a wallflower when I go out.
20. I feel I get pushed around more than others.
21. I think I am a rather nice person.
22. I feel that people really like me very much.
23. I feel that I am a likable person.
24. I am afraid I will appear foolish to others.
25. My friends think very highly of me.

## INDEX OF AGGRESSION (IA) APPENDIX B

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

This questionnaire is designed to measure aggression. It is not a test, so there are no right or wrong answers. Please answer each item as carefully and accurately as you can by placing a number by each one as follows.

- |   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| 1 | Rarely or none of the time |
| 2 | A little of the time       |
| 3 | Some of the time           |
| 4 | A good part of the time    |
| 5 | Most or all of the time    |

Please begin.

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| 1. I feel like hitting others when angry.                            | _____ |
| 2. I am often involved in peer conflicts.                            | _____ |
| 3. I destroy property when angry or upset.                           | _____ |
| 4. I am verbally aggressive towards others when upset.               | _____ |
| 5. I feel like I can only deal with my problems aggressively.        | _____ |
| 6. I feel like I am unable to deal with my problems appropriately.   | _____ |
| 7. I think about hurting others when things don't go my way.         | _____ |
| 8. I often provoke others into fighting.                             | _____ |
| 9. I often hit staff when angry or upset.                            | _____ |
| 10. I use aggression to get my anger out.                            | _____ |
| 11. I have problems interacting with others during group activities. | _____ |
| 12. I sometimes use profanity to get my anger out.                   | _____ |
| 13. I have hurt others with my aggressive acts.                      | _____ |
| 14. When angry I have trouble controlling my temper.                 | _____ |
| 15. My peers often start fights with me.                             | _____ |
| 16. I get into trouble because of my aggression.                     | _____ |
| 17. I feel like I get pushed around more than others.                | _____ |
| 18. I feel good after acting out aggressively.                       | _____ |
| 19. I feel bad after acting out aggressively.                        | _____ |
| 20. I have tried to intentionally hurt others.                       | _____ |
| 21. I think I can control my temper.                                 | _____ |
| 22. My peers pressure me into being aggressive.                      | _____ |
| 23. My arguments often lead to fights.                               | _____ |
| 24. I am very impulsive when upset.                                  | _____ |
| 25. Sometimes I can't make good decisions when angry.                | _____ |

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